

Some notes on the Brahmajājña brāhmaṇa and Uttama-paṭala of the Atharvan tradition

The Brahmajājña brāhmaṇa (1.1.29 of the Gopatha-brāhmaṇa) of the Atharvaveda provides a glimpse of the Vedic saṃhitā canon as known to the brāhmaṇa authors of the AV tradition. The Brahmajājña might be done as part of the basic rite as done by dvija-s of other śākhā-s or in the more elaborate AV tradition of the annual Veda-vrata. The annual vrata-s of the Atharvan brāhmaṇa-s include the Sāvitrī-vrata, Veda-vrata, Kalpa-vrata, Mitra-vrata, Yama-vrata and Mrgāra-vrata. The kṣatriya-s and vaiśya-s may do just 3 and 2 of the respectively, with the first 2 being obligatory. During these vrata-s the ritualist follows certain strictures like not consuming butter milk or eating kidney beans, common millets, or the masura lentil at the evening meal, bathing thrice a day and wearing woolen clothing. Before performing Brahmajājña, he performs the ācamana as per the vidhi which states:

स आचमनं करोति ।

He performs the ritual sipping of water.

This calls for the special Atharvanic ācamana described in the final section of the ācamana-brāhmaṇa of the AV tradition (GB 1.1.39):

तद् अप्य एतद् ऋचोक्तम् –

It has also been thus stated in the ṛk:

आपो भृग्वङ्गिरो रूपम् आपो भृग्वङ्गिरोमयम्
सर्वम् आपोमयं भूतं सर्वं भृग्वङ्गिरोमयम् ॥

The waters are of the form Bṛgu-Āṅiras incantations. The waters are imbued with the Bṛgu-Āṅiras incantations.

All being is imbued with the waters; [thus,] all [being] is imbued by the Bṛgu-Āṅiras incantations.

- The Atharvan-s justify the above ṛk is by noting that the Paippalāda Atharvaveda begins with the ṛk “śaṃ no devīḥ...” to the waters (see below).

अन्तरैते त्रयो वेदा भृगून् अङ्गिरसो ऽनुगाः ॥

Within these [waters] the three [other] Veda-s follow the Bṛgu-Āṅiras incantations.

अपां पुष्पं मूर्तिर् आकाशं पवित्रं उत्तमम् ॥

इति आचम्याभ्युक्ष्य आत्मानम् अनुमन्त्रयत ।

<इन्द्र जीव> [सूर्य जीव देवा जीवा जीव्यासं अहम् । सर्वम् आयुर् जीव्यासम् ॥]

“The flower is the form of the waters, the empty space [and] that which the most pure”. Thus, he sips the water and having sprinkled water (practically mārjanam) he recites the incantation indra jīva etc: Enliven, o Indra; Enliven o Sūrya. Enliven, o gods. May I live. May I complete my term of life.

- The flower of the waters in the above incantation is an allusion to the ṛk describing the the ancient action of the Atharvan-s in kindling the fire in waters [from a lotus]:
त्वाम् अंग्रे पुष्कराद् अघ्य् अथर्वा निर् अमन्थत ।
- He does the ācamana by taking three sips each with two successive words from the mantra apām puṣpam...

इति ब्राह्मणम् ॥

Thus is the brāhmaṇa.

Now for the Brahmayajña:

किं देवतम् इति ? ऋचाम् अग्निर् देवतम् । तद् एव ज्योतिः । गायत्रं छन्दः । पृथिवी स्थानम् ।

अग्निम् ईळे पुरोहितं यज्ञस्य देवम् ऋत्विजम् । होतारं रत्नधातमम् ॥

इत्य् एवम् आदिं कृत्वा ऋग्वेदम् अधीयते ॥

Who is the deity? Agni is the deity of the ṛk-s. That is indeed light. Gāyatrī is its meter. The earth is its station.

“I praise Agni, the officiant of the ritual, the god and ritualist; the hotṛ and the foremost giver of gems.”

Thus, having placed it at the beginning the Ṛgveda is studied.

यजुषां वायुर् देवतम् । तद् एव ज्योतिस् त्रैष्टुभं छन्दः । अन्तरिक्षं स्थानम् ।

इषे त्वोर्जे त्वां वायवं स्थ । देवो वः सविता प्रार्पयतु श्रेष्ठतमायु कर्मणे ॥

इत्य् एवम् आदिं कृत्वा यजुर्वेदम् अधीयते ॥

Vāyu is the deity of the Yajuṣ-es. That is verily light; Triṣṭubh is its meter. The atmosphere is its station.

“To you for nourishment, to you for strength. You are the Vāyu-s. May Savitṛ impel you the most excellent ritual.”

Thus, having placed it at the beginning the Yajurveda is studied.

साम्नाम् आदित्यो देवतम् । तद् एव ज्योतिः । जागतं छन्दः । द्यौः स्थानम् ।

अम् आ याहि वीतये गृणानो ह्व्यदातये । नि होता सत्सि बृहिषि ॥ त्य् एवम् आदिं कृत्वा समावेदम् अधीयते ॥

The Āditya is the deity of the Sāman-s. That is indeed light. Jagati is its meter. The heaven is its station.

O Agni, come to the oblations, praised with songs to the ritual offering. Sit as the hotṛ on the ritual grass.

Thus, having placed it at the beginning the Sāmaveda is studied.

अथर्वणां चन्द्रमा देवतम् । तद् एव ज्योतिः । सर्वाणि छन्दांसि । आपः स्थानम् । <शं नो देवीर् अभिष्टंय> इत्य एवम् आदिं कृत्वाथर्ववेदम् अधीयते ॥

The moon is the deity of the Atharvaṅ incantations. That is indeed light. All are its meters. The waters are its station. “May the divine [waters] be auspicious for us...” Thus, having placed it at the beginning the Atharvaveda is studied.

अद्भ्यः स्थावर-जङ्गमो भूत-ग्रामः संभवति । तस्मात् सर्वम् आपोमयं भूतं सर्वं भृग्वङ्गिरोमयम् । अन्तरैते त्रयो वेदा भृगून् अङ्गिरसः श्रिता इत्य् अब् इति प्रकृतिर् अपाम् ॐकारेण च । एतस्माद् व्यासः पुरोवाचः
भृग्वङ्गिरोविदा संस्कृतो ऽन्यान् वेदान् अधीयीत । नान्यत्र संस्कृतो भृग्वङ्गिरसो ऽधीयीत ॥

From the waters the families of immotile and motile organisms have come into being. Hence, all being is imbued with water; [thus] all is imbued with the Bhṛgu-Āṅgiras incantations. The three other Veda-s are situated within these Bhṛgu-Āṅgiras incantations. Therefore, indeed it is water and the origin of water is by the Oṃkāra. In this regard Vyāsa had formerly said:

“He who is sanctified by the Bhṛgu-Āṅgiras incantations may study the other Veda-s. The one sanctified elsewhere should not study the Veda of the Bhṛgu-Āṅgiras-es.”

- Regarding the origin of all beings from water: this is articulated early on in the ṛk: *yo apsv ā śucinā daivyena...* (RV 2.35.8) of Gṛtsamada Śaunahotra.

सामवेदे ऽथ खिलश्रुतिर् ब्रह्मचर्येण चैतस्माद् अथर्वाङ्गिरसो ह यो वेद स वेद सर्वम् ।
इति ब्राह्मणम् ॥

Now there is also the khila of the Sāmaveda: “Therefore, he who as a celibate student knows the Veda of Atharvāṅgiras-es knows all this.”

Thus is the brāhmaṇa.

- The statement from the Sāmaveda-khila is also taken to justify the punarupanayana that is performed in order for those of other traditions to study the Atharvaveda.

1 Notes

Several notable points are raised by the Brahmayaṅjña brāhmaṇa of the AV, not just regarding the AV tradition but also regarding its interaction with the other Vedic schools and their own evolution. It is quite obvious that the Brahmayaṅjña brāhmaṇa represents a relatively late brāhmaṇa composition with a specific aim of justifying the primacy of the AV, probably in the context of the intra-brahminical competition for the position of the brahman in the śrauta ritual. This is explicitly supported by the fact that it cites Vyāsa [Pārāśarya] who appears in late Vedic texts and is remembered by tradition as the redactor of the 4 fold form of the śruti. In a similar vein, the citation of the Sāmaveda-khila suggests that it was composed after the terminal sections of the Sāmavedic tradition had been completed.

The opening ṛk of the RV is compatible with any of the śakha-s of the Ṛgveda. The Yajurveda that it refers to is clearly the Vājasaneyi saṃhitā (either Mādhyam̐dina or the Kāṇva śākhā-s). The Samaveda could again be any of the Samavedic saṃhitā-s. The Atharvaveda is probably the Paippalāda saṃhitā because the vulgate and the Śaunakīya begin with “ye trīṣaptāḥ...” However, we must note that we do not know the beginning of the lost AV śākhā-s.

Why is this notable? The AV-pariśiṣṭa 46 (Uttama-paṭala) gives the beginning and end verses of the four Veda saṃhitā-s along with several AV verses to be used in the annual Veda-vrata. Notably, these are partly different from those of the Brahmajajña brāhmaṇa. Interestingly, according to the Uttama-paṭala, the RV ends with the famous ṛk: “tac chamyor āvṛṇimahe...”. This is not present in the Śākala-pāṭha which instead ends with the short Saṃjñā-sūkta. The former ṛk was claimed by Michael Witzel to be the last ṛk of the Bāṣkala RV. However, as Vishal Agrawal correctly noted its is stated to be the last ṛk by even the Śāṅkhāyana and Kauśītaki traditions. Thus, the Uttama-paṭala is referring to some RV śākhā other than Śākala, though we cannot be sure of its identity.

The Uttama-paṭala gives the Sāmaveda’s first verse as “agna ā yāhi...”, which is known to be the first ṛk of all surviving śākhā-s of the SV. However, the last ṛk is given as:

एष स्य ते धारया सुतो ऽव्यो वारेभिर् हवने मृदितव्यम् । क्रीडन् रुश्मिर् अपार्थिवः ॥

This is different from the ṛk “svasti na indro vṛddhaśravāḥ...” with which the surviving SV śākhā-s conclude. It is a divergent variant of the ṛk RV 9.108.5 not attested elsewhere. In fact the extant SV saṃhitā-s contain a version that follows the RV cognate. Thus, evidently the Uttama-paṭala is referring to a now lost SV śākhā.

The situation with the YV is the most interesting. The cited starting mantra goes thus:

इषे त्वोर्जे त्वां वायवं स्थोपायवं स्थ देवो वंः सविता प्रार्थयतु श्रेष्ठतमायु कर्मणु आ प्यायध्वम् अघ्न्या इन्द्राय भागम् ऊर्जस्वतीः पर्यस्वतीः प्रजावतीर् अनमीवा अयुक्ष्मा मा वं स्तेन ईशत माघशंसो रुद्रस्यं हेतिः परि वो वृणक्तु ध्रुवा अस्मिन् गोपतौ स्यात बुद्धीर् यजमानस्य पशून् पाहि ॥

Remarkably, this mantra is not found in any of the extant YV saṃhitā-s. However, the “indrāya bhāgam” is reminiscent of the “indrāya deva-bhāgam” found in the Āpastamba-śrautasūtra and the Bhāradvāja-śrautasūtra or the “devebhya indrāya” found in the Maitrāyaṇīya saṃhitā. This indicates two things: first, the Uttama-paṭala is recording a now lost YV śākhā of the Kṛṣṇayajurveda (KYV). Second, while today Āpastamba and Bhāradvāja are attached to the Taittirīya-śākhā, they were once the sūtra-s of a lost KYV śākhā. This loss likely happened relatively early. It was probably associated with the southward movement of the Āpastamba-s and Bhāradvāja-s, who then shifted to the related Taittirīya-saṃhitā (TS). The text of the Baudhāyana-śrautasūtra precisely follows the TS; hence, it was definitely one of the original sūtra-s of the Taittirīya-śākhā.

Finally, the AV of the Uttama-paṭala begins with “ye trisaptāḥ...” indicating that it was recording the original śākhā behind the vulgate or the Śaunakīya.

Thus, we see a striking difference between the two AV traditions of the Gopatha-brāhmaṇa and the Uttama-paṭala. While the tendency is to see the AV-pariśiṣṭa-s as late and post-dating the brāhmaṇa, we have to be more cautious. First, the AV-pariśiṣṭa-s are a rather composite mass recording a range of traditions that with a wide temporal span. Some material like the Nakṣatra-kalpa-sūkta could be closer to the late brāhmaṇa material in age whereas, at the other end, the

tortoise-soothsaying (Kurmavibhāga) is likely a late text. We posit that the Uttama-pāṭala belongs to the an early layer of the AV-pariśiṣṭa-s – this provides a reasonable hypothesis for the divergence between it and the brāhmaṇa. First, it should be noted that the AV-Paippalāda-AV-Śaunakīya/vulgate divergence is rather deep – mirroring the deep divergence of the Kṛṣṇa and Śukla branches of the Yajurveda. This split might have gone along with some geographical separation in the initial phase of their divergence. This geographical separation model would suggest that the Brahmayaṅga brāhmaṇa tradition was associated with the AV-Paippalāda or a related lost AV school that was in the vicinity of the old Vājasaneyin-s. This is also supported by certain parallels seen between the Gopatha-brāhmaṇa and the Śatapatha-brāhmaṇa in the śrauta sections. In contrast, the Uttama-pāṭala as associated with the Śaunakīya or a related school that developed in the vicinity of a lost KYV śākhā.

We have evidence that the interactions between the KYV and AV traditions might go back even deeper in time: for example, this is clearly supported by the AV-related Bhavā-Śarvā-sūkta of the Kaṭha-s that was likely present in the lost Kaṭha-brāhmaṇa and the various shared sūkta-s and upaniṣat material between the Taittirīya and the AV. Finally, we have evidence from what is today Gujarat that at a later period there was a certain equilibration of the AV schools with the combination of the Paippalāda and Śaunakīya material. This parallels a similar acquisition of some Kaṭha material by the Taittirīya. Thus, there appears to have been a relatively complex web of fission and fusion interactions between the śākhā-s over a protracted period.